The A.B.C. of National Defense

BY J. W. Muller.

A DOMINATING principle of the American commonwealth, though unwritten, is that military power shall not be maintained for aggressive purposes. Therefore all considerations for preparedness are based on the accepted rule that it shall be limited strictly to the strength necessary for adequate defense.

It used to be believed, not only by civilians, but by some military authorities, that a small army and navy would furnish a safe "nucleus" on which a completely effective fighting force could be built quickly in time of war. This belief made the country contented with its "skeleton" army.

There may have been some sound reasoning in this theory once. There is none now. Modern war has become a matter of such enormously complicated science that civilians snatched suddenly from peaceful pursuits cannot hope to master it in time for emergency. Army movements and battles call for such extreme physical exertions that men accustomed to the indoor life of cities cannot possibly meet the demands until they have had some months of hardening.

* * *

Even so far back as the Franco-Prussian war there was a striking proof of the impossibility of enlarging a skeleton army with the flesh and bone of fresh recruits. Gen. Lapasset, in front of Metz, failed again and again to hold positions with his brigade, which was made up partly of trained soldiers and partly of newly enlisted men hastily recruited. In desperation, he eliminated the untrained men, sending them to shelter within the fortress. Thereafter, his numerically weakened, but now coherent and trained brigade, held its ground against the same attacks that had sent it reeling when it had more men in it.

Thus the people of the United States must realize first of all that training is vital. Any project for defense that fails to put it foremost surely will break down under test. It may be accepted as an axiom that untrained men who go into war hereafter will go not to fight, but to be killed.

To give Americans the necessary training, without forming a large standing army or entering on a career of militarism, army experts and political students have agreed on a feasible and easily operated method. This method is to form an army reserve.

The public has been more or less hampered in understanding the simplicity of the army reserve scheme, because there is so much legislative and administrative complexity of detail about it. These details, however, really are not anything that need to concern the civilian public at all. No matter how much the details may vary, the object of all the proposed legislation is the same. It is simply to assure to the United States the services in time of war of every available man who has been trained by previous service in the regular army.

The method proposed for forming such an army reserve is to cut down the term of enlistment to the minimum period that is needed to make a man a thoroughly trained soldier. As soon as this is accomplished a newly enlisted man is to take his place, while the trained man gets his discharge from active service, on condition that he shall be at the instant bidding of the commander-in-chief of the army. It will be necessary, of course, to pay a certain small sum annually to the men who thus hold themselves in reserve, but the expense will be vastly less, both in pay and in maintenance, than if the nation attempted to support a big force actively in the army.

* * *

An army reserve begun under this system would increase in astonishing arithmetical ratio. Assuming the term of enlistment to be one year (enough to assure perfect training), the reserves at the end of five years would be four times the standing army. In other words, for each soldier enlisted in the fifth year, there would be four men in reserve ready for immediate service in defense of our more than 30,000 miles of coast line, the protection of which is the deciding factor in the problem of American defense. This condition makes it impossible to rely completely on either a navy alone or an army alone. Therefore the principle has been accepted permanently that there must be three American lines of defense—a fleet, a system of harbor defenses and a mobile army.

Unfortunately the harbor defenses and the army have come to be regarded as one, both by the public and Congress. This grave fallacy has led the nation to fall into the mistaken belief that harbor defense meant defense of the entire coast.

Furthermore, the garrisons of the harbor defenses, known as coast artillery, have been counted as part of the strength of the mobile army, which has given a most misleading idea as to the actual size of that army. The coast artillery cannot possibly be used to strengthen the mobile army in time of war.

In point of adequate preparedness and efficiency, the present values of the three lines of defense are, (1) harbor defenses, (2) fleet, (3) mobile army.

This is a fatally incorrect proportion. The correct relative values, if every line of defense is made properly efficient, will be (1) fleet, (2) mobile army, (3) harbor defenses.

This means, of course, not that the efficiency of the harbor defenses should be lessened, but that the fleet must be so strengthened that it will serve as the first and most powerful line of defense, while the army should be increased because in the event of invasion it has to defend the harbor defenses as well as the country.

The harbor defenses lead in efficiency today largely because they are matters of permanent engineering. They need certain important improvements, which will be named elsewhere, but their most direct defect is a gross weakness of trained garrisons. If the other two lines of defense were in such satisfactory condition, or so easily to be made perfect, there would be little need for anxiety.

* * *

It is regretted by military experts that the name "coast defenses" has been applied so generally to these works. They do not defend the coast. They protect only the very limited harbors whose entrances their guns command. Doing this, they serve entirely the whole purpose for which they are designed.

It has been asked often by laymen why the entire coast line should not be defended by such works, thus putting a stop forever to all danger of invasion. To military engineers such a question appears too absurd to be worth a serious reply, but it is a natural question for civilians to ask.

The reply is simple. The utmost effective range of the fourteen-inch rifled cannon, the largest seacoast gun, is 18,000 yards, or a trifle more than ten miles. Therefore, to protect the whole coast, fortifications would have to be built a little less than twenty miles apart if there is to be no gap uncovered by gunfire. For the 30,000 miles of coast this would mean 1,500 fortifications.

At the valuation placed on Forts Hamilton and Wadsworth in New York harbor, such a chain of defenses would cost ten billions of dollars to build and arm, and would demand the continuous services of one-half million men, even at the present inadequate rate of garrisoning existing defenses.

It is impossible, then, to protect the American coast with fixed defenses greatly in excess of the existing ones. By far the greater part of the coast line must depend solely on the remaining two lines of defense—the fleet and the mobile army.

If the fleet were absolutely perfect, war never could be brought to the territory of the United States. It would be fought out at sea, perhaps 2,000 miles from the North American continent.

But to establish such a line of defense the navy absolutely must be powerful enough to seek the foe and attack him. Though the military axiom that attack is the only safe defense is true of the army as well as the navy, it is not fatal to an army to fall back on the defensive, whereas it is fatal to a navy almost always.

* * *

An army may intrench itself, await attack, and win. It lies in the path of the hostile army, and the enemy must overcome it before he can proceed. A navy that assumes the defensive can do so only by hiding in a fortified harbor to be protected by coast guns and mine fields. That moment it is eliminated from the war. The enemy need not destroy it. The enemy ships need not even fire a shot at it. They can lie beyond the range of the coast guns, and need simply to blockade it.

The American people will do well to realize clearly that a defending fleet that is weaker than an assailing fleet must intern or be destroyed. There is no alternative.

A fleet action hereafter will be fearful and quick. When it is ended the weaker fleet will have been blasted from the face of the waters. If any of its units escape they will not be enough to make a navy for a fourth-class power.

Is the United States navy strong enough to enter such an engagement with any other fleet?

The answer of the Navy Year Book for 1914, issued by direction of Congress, is given in the following tables:

Relative order of present warship tonnage:

Great Britain	2,157,850
Germany	961,772
United States	765,133

Relative order when vessels now building are completed:

Great Britain	2,714,106
Germany	1,306,577
France	899,915
United States	894,899

The answer is more striking still if the comparison is limited to dreadnaughts. This comparatively new type of ship undoubtedly is the deciding factor in modern naval war. The submarine probably will alter the conditions and strategy of naval campaigns, but when fleets actually meet it will be the dreadnaughts that will do the smashing. This monster, with its batteries of great guns, more numerous than once were mounted in fortresses, is the destroying angel of the sea.

Great Britain has twenty dreadnaughts afloat, and last autumn had sixteen building. Germany has thirteen afloat and seven building. France has four afloat and eight building. The United States has eight afloat and four building and three authorized.

This list is limited to such vessels as the belligerent nations actually had laid down in the normal course of their shipbuilding programs. It is known that they have increased their construction immensely.

If the constant advice of the general board of the navy had been accepted by Congress the United States fleet should consist now of at least thirty-two first-class battleships and dreadnaughts, all of a type fit for the first line.

This board, organized in obedience to legislation by Congress, laid down a naval policy in 1903. All the successive members of the board since then have approved it and reported to Congress in accordance with it. Congress never has acted on it. In fact, the record of Congress for the past twenty-five years shows that never has the nation had a consistent warship building program.

The 1890 Congress authorized the first true battleships ever built by the United States. These vessels, Indiana, Massachusetts and Oregon, were consistent types, equal in tonnage, armament and speed. It was a sound beginning.

Battleships were not an experiment. Other navies had been building this type for years, and it was established that it was the only type of ship that would keep a navy in the first rank. Yet the Congress of 1891 authorized none, but appropriated money instead for the Minneapolis, a "protected" cruiser, whose type had been practically replaced in other navies by armored vessels.

The 1892 Congress permitted the construction of the battleship Iowa, a good vessel.

The Congress of 1893 and 1894 authorized no battleships at all. Thus by 1895 the nation had four first-class battleships when it should have had, afloat and under construction, fifteen ships equal to any then in commission. The record of succeeding Congresses was: 1895, two first-class battleships, Kearsarge and Kentucky; 1896, three, Alabama, Illinois and Wisconsin; 1897, none.

Therefore, in 1898, when the Spanish-American war began, instead of having eighteen first-class battleships afloat and six under construction, as would have been the case had the various Congresses voted three battleships in each year, the United States had five—Kentucky, Kearsarge, Alabama, Illinois and Wisconsin—under construction, with no possible chance of finishing them for several years to come. The only battleships afloat were the original four—Massachusetts, Oregon, Indiana and Iowa.

The war session saw a mad scramble of appropriation to make up in headlong, wasteful speed for years of wasteful indifference. Congress hurled an appropriation of fifty millions forth in one short bill for "national defense." There was a rush to buy freight and passenger steamships, steam yachts and even tugboats. The consequence was such a naval spectacle as probably never was seen in war before.

* * *

Observers have not forgotten and will not be able to forget while they live the wonderful fleet that Admiral Sampson took to bombard San Juan de Porto Rico. There were armored and unarmored ships, each of a different type, age, tonnage and speed. There were "converted" yachts, meaning plain, ordinary pleasure yachts that had guns mounted hastily. To crown the absurdity there were coast defense monitors ten years old, utterly useless for battle and so slow that at last the war fleet took them in tow. Thus the American Navy, by the grace of Congress, went to war.

The lesson of that war was not heeded by succeeding Congresses. In 1903 the general board proposed a program of two battleships each year, in order to build up a battleship fleet of forty-eight vessels by 1919. It was not an extravagant program, but the 1904 Congress authorized only one battleship. To make up for this, the general board asked the 1905 Congress for three ships. It got two. Succeeding Congresses voted: 1907, one; 1908, 1909, 1910 and 1911, two ships each.

The 1912 and 1913 Congresses authorized only one each, making the program short five ships, without counting the shortage to be caused by the retirement of Indiana, Oregon, Massachusetts and Iowa, which were already rated as antiquated, owing to the immense changes in naval construction.

In November, 1914, under the general board's original plan, as modified by the necessity for replacing all ships twenty years old, there should have been in commission thirty-eight battleships less than that age, with seven building and two authorized. Instead, there were only thirty in commission, four building and three authorized. This is a deficiency of ten battleships from the number contemplated in the program, which, it must be understood, contemplated in the beginning only the minimum number of first-line ships that were absolutely and undeniably needed.

Next Sunday's article will explain the needs of a modern United States Navy in detail.

The Why and Wherefore for a Trained Reserve—Immeasurable Value of the Fleet as the First Line of Defense—Just What the Army and Navy Would Have to Do in War. What They Need for Successful Performance—A Series of Articles Expressing Facts and Opinions as to Our National Needs.

Women of Europe Searching the Battlefields for Their Lost Soldiers

While Waiting for Letters That Never Come, Women Form Searching Parties—Bitterest and Most Tragic Phases of the War—Possibly Eight Million Soldiers Have Been Removed From the Active Lists of All the Armies—A Remarkable Mental Condition Produced by the Strain of Waiting—Records of Losses Cannot Be Kept—War Makes All Women Sisters.

Special Correspondence of The Star.

PARIS, June 25, 1915.

IT is not on the battle front that is found all the bitter tragedy of this war. If you would realize to the full its unending suffering, go to the home of the soldier, particularly to the home of the missing soldier.

Because of the confusion that has come with the frightful lists of the dead, wounded and captured, half the women of Europe have turned themselves into seekers for their soldiers; and the greatest agony is that suffered by those who can get no certain trace of their loved ones.

When the news does come, good or bad; when the truth is known, there is no strength left to meet it. Daily Christian women die, merely bend and fall when their search is ended. Their story is not recorded in the newspapers, which tell of glory, of battles won, of the infamy of the enemy—lies which deceive not the women.

* * *

If you would know what the war means to these waiting women, go to the churches. You will find them crowded. Here in Paris, Our Lady of Victories, so famed for vows answered, is hot night and day with the heat from the thousands of burning candles, each flickering flame an emblem of silent prayer. Notre Dame, usually so dark, is lighted as never before by these symbols of prayers offered.

In the poorer, home quarter of Montrouge, its church presents the strange spectacle of women praying with arms stretched heavenward, frantically uplifted, imploring God to save their soldiers. Everywhere a prayer, and, above all, a prayer for news of the missing.

The least unhappy of all these unhappy women of Europe are those who know their loved ones are prisoners of war, or else so badly crippled they can do no more military service.

The merely unhappy are those who are sure their loved ones are no more. Death has become commonplace, suffering and sacrifice the lot of all; the beautiful, joyous life of peace seems so impossible ever to come again that the news of a death at the front does not plunge a wife or mother into extravagant grief.

The unhappiest women are those who do not know for sure what has become of their soldiers, whose loved ones may be prisoners, or, for all the laws of chance say to the contrary, may lie hidden under the wreckage of some mined trench, or in a nameless grave.

* * *

It is the uncertainty of the searchers that is more than human nature can bear, the cruel suspense that becomes each day more dreadful, the never-ending quest which begins in hope, pauses in despair, is always begun again because of the hope that will not lie still.

The history of humanity has never presented anything more remarkable than this unceasing search for sons, fathers, husbands, sweethearts, conducted on a tremendous scale by millions of women. And one peculiar development of it is that the German and French wives and mothers have begun to write to each other about their lost soldiers, and to aid each other in every way they can.

Strangely enough, the very intensity of the bitterness with which the men are fighting in this war is what is building up between the women of the warring nations this rapidly growing bond of sympathy and helpfulness. And since letters cannot pass directly between France and Germany, thousands of kind women in Switzerland are now acting as intermediaries.

"Where is my soldier?" That question is on the lips of half the women of Germany, of France, of Austria, of Belgium. They have quit thinking about the causes of the war, have quit asking God why He let it come, or when it will end. All they want now is an answer to this single question.

But they do not shout it from the roof-tops. One of the surprises of this war to every person who visits Europe is the apparent apathy of the civil populations. Life seems to go on as usual. The shops are open, the railways running, the street cars in service, the mail is carried regularly. There is no sound of cannon, no marching of troops to speak of. All the casual visitor notices, say in the cities of France, is the unusual number of women, of whom many are in mourning, all showing a certain neglect in their dress.

A close observer, however, will see that nearly every woman's eyes are red, the skin about them drawn, with little circles of black underneath. And off the main streets, in the small shops and in the homes, he will hear this question asked over and over again.

Searching has become the chief occupation of the women and absorbs them even when they are caring for the wounded, sending children to school, keeping up the old make-believe existence that so surprises the stranger.

They have formed themselves into searching societies that far outnumber in membership the total of the troops of all the armies, into little groups that carry no name. And they write and write, millions of letters, and then write again, to every conceivable person who might have some news of their lost ones. The women who have no men at the front join in the search, because they understand how sorely waiting tries the heart.

When the women don't write they visit each other, always looking for some slight clue that may add another link to the endless chain that is each individual search. Here in France countesses call upon janitors, janitors upon countesses, with the utmost freedom. Strange women talk to each other or to men in the street, in the cars, wherever they feel they can find a fresh bit of news.

The war has made all women sisters and all men their brothers. It is not unusual for a woman to stop in the street an officer or a soldier home on sick leave, or just out of the hospital, and ask if he has heard of her lost one; for huge as are the armies, it is always possible that one soldier may have met another.

The difficulties of the search are staggering. It is estimated here that 8,000,000 men have been dropped from the active lists of all the armies, as sick, wounded, dead, prisoners or missing.

England alone, with her comparatively small army occupying but thirty-six of the 570 mile line of trenches stretching from the channel to the Swiss frontiers, has to date lost in these ways no fewer than 150,000 men. Originally an army of less than 200,000, it is now an army of 600,000, so England's losses are daily mounting.

Germany has lost, it is roughly estimated, fully three million men in these various ways. France has lost, roughly and in all ways, 1,500,000, exclusive of the civil population in northern France, which, within the German lines, has been in much the same condition as the Belgian civil population. Austria and Russia have each lost as heavily as France. So huge a total will not seem unreasonable when it is considered that in the United States civil war, which was but a baby war compared to this one, the Confederate army of 750,000 men lost 475,000 in prisoners alone.

How many of this huge total are dead, or in hospital, or prisoners to the enemy?

* * *

For military reasons none of the governments would give complete lists if it could. But none can, save possibly the English. The difficulties of keeping account of losses will be realized if it is remembered that in the civil war of the United States accurate subdivisions of losses could not be compiled until long after the war. At such a battle as Chancellorsville it was in later years computed that out of 17,287 Union soldiers dropped from the rolls, no fewer than one-third—5,919—were missing. In all the great battles of this war the proportion of the missing was one-third to one-fourth the losses.

The number of German prisoners in France has steadily increased during the last few months until it is now upward of 400,000. Barring errors, these names are all known in Germany, they tell you bitterly here. And in the same breath they accuse the Germans in many cases of withholding the lists of their prisoners to demoralize the French civil population and to destroy the French race by underfeeding the prisoners.

Those prisoners who, by bribe or otherwise, have gotten news home to France give descriptions of their treatment that would make the charges against the Confederate treatment of Union soldiers in Libby prison pale in comparison.

Further, there has been but a limited exchange of prisoners. It is a war of exhaustion and each side has apparently adopted the attitude of Gen. Grant who, in refusing to exchange prisoners, declared the man who died in a prison from illness or for want of food laid down his life for his country made a sacrifice equal to that of the man who lost his life on the battlefield.

In view of these and other conditions, how can a woman know that her soldier is alive or dead?

Think what happens along that deep, straggling line of trenches in France that separates the allies and German armies. Every day a battle is fought and the list of the lost runs from a hundred to ten thousand. Each side takes so and so many prisoners. The Germans may advance a hundred yards at one point, the French a hundred yards at another. It is a seesaw game.

At neither point, where the fighting is always to exhaustion, is it possible, particularly as the most severe fighting is in nightime, for either side to know precisely which of its men lost were killed, or remained within the trenches, taken by the enemy as wounded or able-bodied prisoners.

Consider the second battle of Soissons, in early January. There the French retired, leaving the ground literally covered with dead. It was known that several thousand prisoners were also taken by the Germans. But as the ground, with its trenches, taken by the Germans has been disputed ever since, always under fire, neither side has had an opportunity to bury its dead or to identify the dead.

Thus, so far as concerns the French families, they have not even to this date been able to learn whether their soldiers lie dead on that disputed ground or have been sent into Germany as prisoners.

Right after that battle fully 5,000 Frenchwomen began the weary search for their loved ones, and they are still searching, as, doubtless, are as many women in Germany.

* * *

These women begin their inquiry at the war offices. There they can get no certain information. A few months ago the clerks there, as at the military offices in each municipality, used to be free in handing out death notices—there were so many dead. But a few mistakes have made them conservative. Then they pity these poor women, with their pleadings for news.

"My God, how can I tell where your son is!" the writer heard a wreck of a clerk tell a weeping mother one day. "I have two sons lost myself and I cannot get news of them."

Thus the long search begins. It began last August in a few hundred thousand homes, and each day since then it has been growing until today there is scarcely a home untouched.

After the woman gets tired of haunting the military offices, she tries the hospitals, and examines their lists of names, often is permitted to visit every ward and examine the faces of the unidentified—faces too often disfigured beyond recognition.

Next she begins to write to the comrades of her soldier. Chance may let her find some comrade who escaped while all the members of his company were killed or were surrendered. This man comforts her as best he can. If he has positive news of the death of her soldier, he is afraid to give it.

She learns a little here, a little there. She gets a new name to write to, and, thanks to the free postal system for soldiers, no matter how poor she may be, if she has paper she can always write.

Days and weeks and months pass, her anxious heart unsatisfied, throbbing one hour with hope, the next with awful doubt, the next in despair. She would become frantic because of the uncertainty could she not go to church, tell her tale to God, ask Him for help, for comfort.

And what of the end of the search?

Recently in France, in Paris, at the Cathedral of Notre Dame, a funeral was held. A mother had received official news of the death of her son in the trenches. His body, of course, could not be sent her; but she held the funeral just the same, over an empty bier, as is the custom, inviting friends of the family to attend.

A few days after the funeral, when the mother was becoming resigned to her loss, she received personal word from comrades of her son that he certainly was not dead, that he had, however, been wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans. Since then the mother, always without direct news from her son, has begun a distracting search for him which is wearing her out, and may end in her own funeral.

The writer knows of a poor shopwoman of the Marais quarter of Paris who received news months ago from the war department that her husband was "grievously wounded," which in later her husband came home, discharged from a hospital.

No man or body of men could conduct this search with the faith or the fervor of the women. I was present lately at a meeting of two families whose sons, of the same regiment, had been lost in the same battle. The two mothers present had joined forces in their search. I asked one of these mothers, who had not had news of her son for four months, just what proof she had that made her believe he was alive.

She recited her little tale, told me all the circumstances of the battle, how certain of his comrades had seen him by their side, how he had later given himself up to the Germans. She said the war department carried him as "missing," but had no other news. She felt sure he must be alive. Finally, as her last proof, she said: "God told me so."

She uttered these few words in such a calm, matter-of-fact manner that, surrounded as all of us are by the mad influences of a war that daily astounds, overturns the sane thought of a routine world, I was quite afraid to acknowledge to myself my doubt of the finality of her proof.

And while the great search goes on, be it said, tenderly, the madhouses, the asylums are being slowly filled. Every now and then, in the outer sections of the great cities, the passer-by may hear a wail, a cry coming from a carriage, the cry of another poor mad woman who could not stand the strain of waiting.

If the woman does not go mad—and, thank goodness, she gets enough human and divine comfort, as a rule, to keep her balanced—she may yet become a prey to the fortune-tellers, among whom are some of the many criminals who are reaping a harvest from the war that is impoverishing so many homes.

Slowly the woman puts together her little house of hope—and how her heart leaps when the doorbell rings. These personal searches are not by any means fruitless, nor the end tragic, if the beginning of the search was founded on some certain evidence that keeps the hope alive.

Strange stories will one day be told of the Odysseys that are these searches, stories that will exceed in weirdness any of those that grew out of the French revolution, when the world seemed mad—and psychologists such as LeBon have since pronounced part of the French nation really mad.

* * *

The writer has in mind one wife and one mother who succeeded in finding their soldier by a mental process the sanity of which would not be doubted on this side of the water today for a moment. Their soldier in January was in the trenches near Rheims. They got letters from him several times a week to assure them that he was safe.

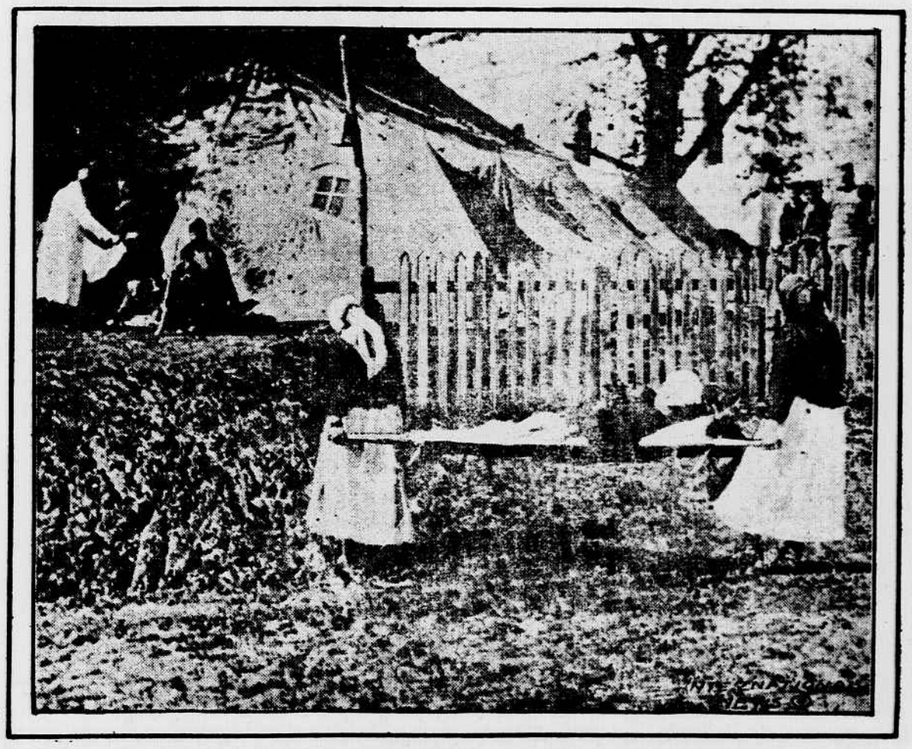
One night the mother saw in a dream, through the blinding flashes of light and the mist of battle smoke, her son crouching under the debris of a trench, and beside him a dozen of his comrades. As she told me afterward, they seemed to her to be waiting, as they were not fighting.

The same night the wife saw her husband in a dream, dragging himself along a muddy road, and beside him were other weary soldiers, the whole group guarded by dim bodies, other soldiers with fixed bayonets. The two women compared notes the next day, both declaring that their soldier must have been taken prisoner. They received no more letters from him, but learned through the war department that he was missing.

These two women then began their search in due form, full of hope, and this May they received a scrawl of a letter from him, smuggled through to them by some kind German, telling them he was a prisoner, beseeching them not to worry about him.

The state of mind the writer has loosely sketched here cannot but result in more terrible tragedies when the war is at last over, when all of the loved ones have been accounted for, when many thousands of the woman searchers must realize that their soldiers will never more come home to them.

WOMAN NURSES SEARCHING AMONG THE DEAD AND WOUNDED.



SERBIAN WOMEN ACTING AS STRETCHER-BEARERS DURING A HEAVY BATTLE.